

Challenges facing primary health care across the Nordic countries



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The Nordic countries experience the same overall challenges of:



An aging population



An increased prevalence of chronic diseases



Decreasing length of hospital stays



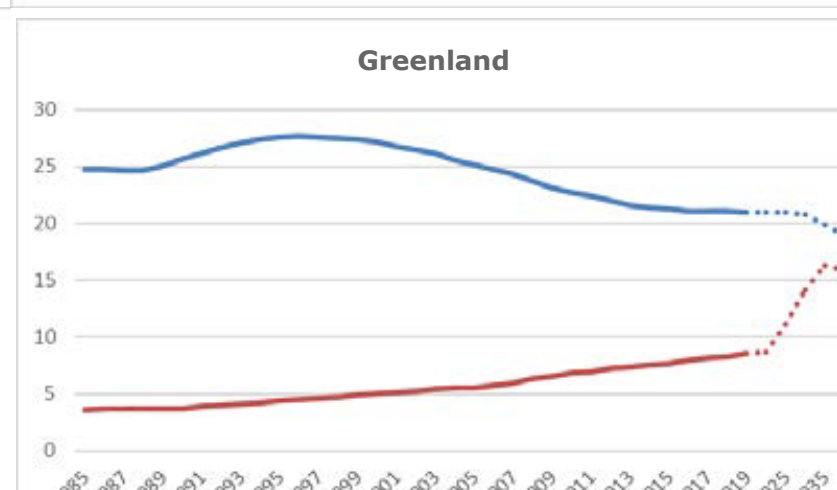
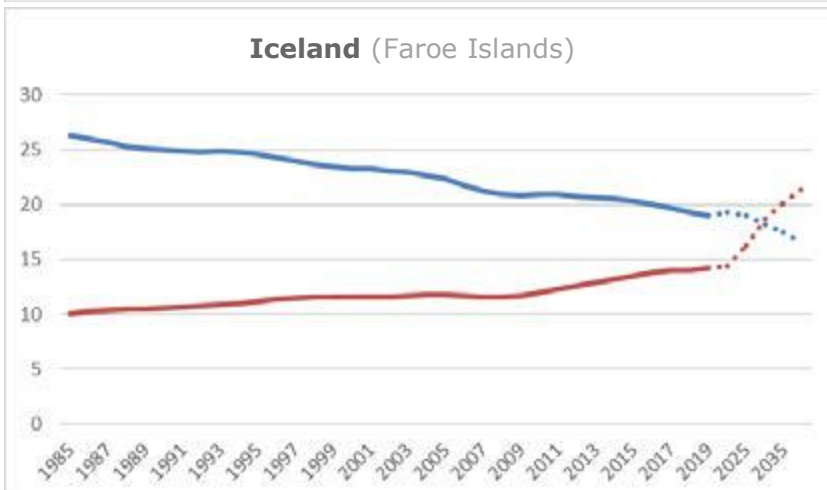
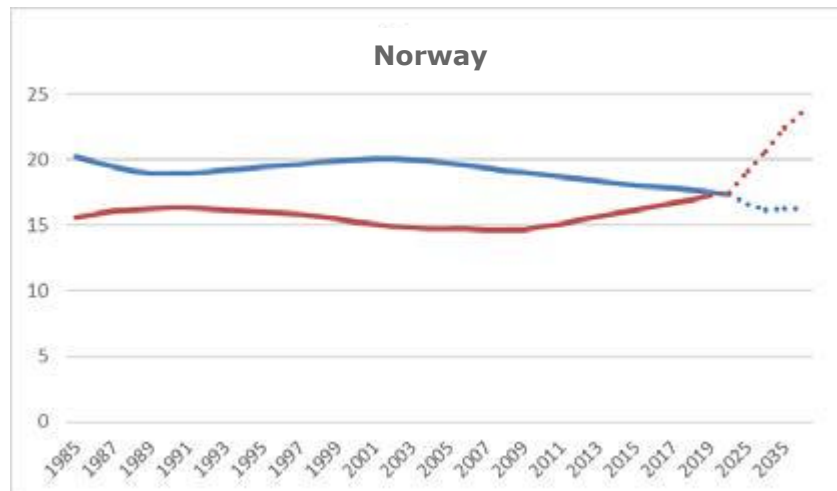
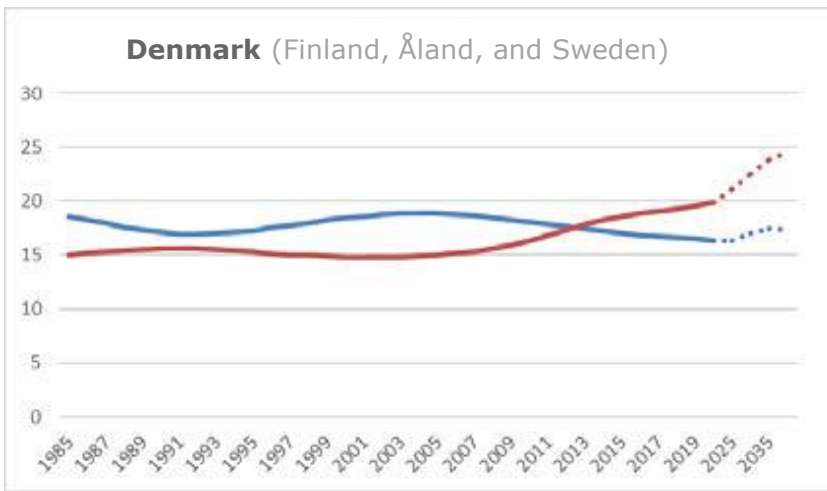
Difficulties in recruiting health professionals

The aging population is a result of two demographic factors

- Increasing life expectancy
- Greater proportion of elderly people

Variation in the national patterns of the aging population

Population changes in different age groups (blue: 0-14 years, red: age group 65+)



Source: Nordic Statistics, Table POPU01

The aging population is a challenge in rural areas in particular

The prospective old-age dependency ratio (POADR) by municipality type

	Urban	Intermediate	Rural	Total
Denmark	17.4	21.1	23.6	21.6
Finland	14.8	20.1	26.0	24.5
Iceland	13.0	10.5	14.2	14.0
Norway	13.8	16.3	19.4	18.6
Sweden	15.2	21.8	25.9	23.3
Åland	-	15.1	19.0	18.7
Greenland	-	-	19.9	19.9
Faroe Islands	-	-	17.2	17.2
Nordic Region	15.3	19.6	22.2	21.2

Source: Table 4.1 in Nordic Council of Ministers. State of the Nordic Region 2020. Copenhagen: Nordic Co-operation; 2020

An increased prevalence of chronic diseases is seen in the Nordic countries due to several factors:



The ageing population



Improved diagnostic and treatment skills

And an increase in:

- The demands on health care – especially primary health care



Shorter hospital stays implies

- that the primary health care sector has to handle increasingly more complex patients
- reinforced needs for coordination between different health care professionals and health care sectors
- the need for an appropriate framework for providing **after hours medical services**



The challenge of recruiting health care personnel

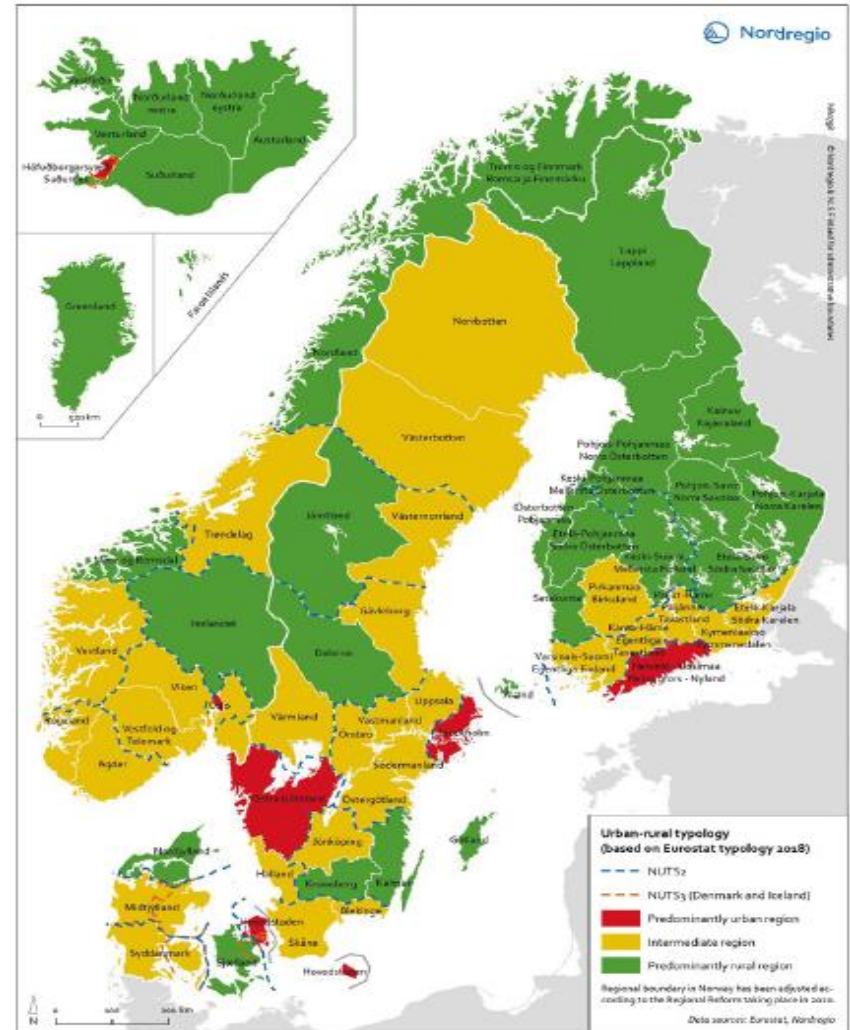
- Particularly pronounced in the primary health care sector
 - especially GPs but also nurses and other health care professionals
- The challenge is most pronounced in rural areas... but larger cities are increasingly experiencing the same challenge
- Besides geography, other country-specific reasons for recruitment challenges are for instance:
 - in Norway – high workload of GPs
 - In Finland, newly graduated physicians prefer working in specialist care

Solutions to the shortage

- eHealth
- Educational and financial incentives

Differences in the geographic and demographic features lead to different conditions for primary health care provisions

- Across the Nordic countries and within each country:
 - Size (30.000 to 10 million inhabitants)
 - Age structure (the aging population is particular a challenge in rural areas)
 - Geographic surroundings
 - Density, degree, and pattern of dispersion



Concluding remarks

➤ The Nordic countries experience the same overall challenges:



An aging population



An increased prevalence of chronic diseases



Decreasing length of hospital stays



Difficulties in recruiting health professionals

...However, the extent of the challenges varies across the Nordic countries and within each country

➤ The challenges seem particularly pronounced in rural areas